Harriett Haith

AAUW

Oral History Project

6/16/1989

Interviewed by Alice Wheat

Born Nov. 2, 1931, in Raleigh, NC, Harriett Haith taught high school for many years and served on the Asheville City School Board, including one term as Chair of the Board.

President of AAUW

Names: Florence Ryan

Race relations -- North Carolina
African Americans -- Education -- North Carolina
Young Women's Christian Association of the U.S.A. -- North Carolina -- Asheville
Young Men's Christian Association of the U.S.A. -- North Carolina -- Asheville
American Association of University Women -- North Carolina -- Asheville
School Integration -- North Carolina -- Asheville
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Education -- North Carolina -- Asheville -- History

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Interview of HARRIET HAITH
By ALICE WHEAT
June 16, 1989

AW: This is Alice Wheat and I am talking today with Harriet Haith. Today is June 16th, 1989, and I am talking with Harriet Haith, who is past president of our Asheville Chapter of the AAUW. How are you this morning, Harriet?

HH: I'm fine.

AW: Well, this project is sponsored by AAUW and we are interested, first of all, in what led you to join the chapter here.

HH: I remember quite vividly what led me to join. Florence Ryan called me and asked me about joining. And I'd known Florence for a long time, in her many activities in the community and there was no saying no to Florence. Of course, I was interested but, actually, at the time I didn't know a great deal about what AAUW did. But I joined.

AW: And how long ago was that?

HH: That was three or four years ago.

AW: Okay. Well, what then led you to become president?

HH: Well, I don't know. That one I'm not sure about. The nominating committee that year contacted me about becoming president-elect and I debated it and at the time I don't think I was involved in too many things because it was shortly after my retirement. I had a little time in there when I wasn't involved in too many things. Virginia Daniels was serving on the nominating committee and she and Mary Hyde, I think I had become acquainted with Mary through the study group that I had joined. So both of them talked about it and I accepted it.

AW: Well, tell me about that year when you were president. What was your experience in that year and about AAUW.

HH: Well, I thought it was a good year. I didn't really feel that I contributed that much. I had worked with Nancy during the year that I was president-elect and Nancy was president and she had begun a number of things. I guess maybe it started even before she became president with the feeling that we needed to study ourselves take a new focus or whatever, and during her year there had been some studies made about our interests and what we needed to do and then during the year we started working on those things. But our main interest was on diversifying our membership. And it wasn't just the focus in our chapter, it was the focus in the region and maybe even of the association. I'm not certain about that. But I know across the state there had been this focus on diversifying our memberships in many ways Anyway, whatever way it was, we decided to work on the age difference and, of course, we could do some diversification with respect to minorities membership. We decided that most of our members were retiring or people near retirement, and that maybe we needed to try to interest some of the younger women and men, but especially younger women. And so this year a new study group was organized. We focused on younger women and I understand that it's going very well and that we still have that emphasis. We thought it was just best to take it slowly and try to get members that would probably stay with the organization instead of doing a lot of arm-twisting and get a lot of folks and then they're here and then gone. So I really think we got women to join who are going to be with the organization and then they in turn will attract other young women. One of them I saw just the other night, she was saying she had just recruited a couple of younger women.

And other than that, I have been working this year in the incoming president, Betty Hart(?), and she has some very exciting things. Then this year I think we also started the oral history but I can't really say that I had anything to do with that. It was just moving along with the things that were already started. We didn't really initiate anything. We just continued things. We had the Biltmore Festival then, we had the branch development. Everybody doing something different this year for fundraising.

AW: You said that you retired. What did was your position when you retired?

HH: I was a teacher, high school science and math teacher. I taught for 30 years. It was probably time to leave and try something different.

AW: 30 years. You saw a lot of changes, didn't you?

HH: Yes, I did. I certainly did.

AW: Were those years spent here in Asheville?

HH: Twenty-five were spent here.

AW: I'm going to ask you to go back a bit right now and tell me something about your family and how you were influenced by them, both educationally and personally.

HH: My father was the son of a Methodist minister. Neither of my parents finished college. My father attended college but he didn't graduate. My mother was the daughter of a South Carolina farmer and she never attended college. She finished high school. Oddly enough her father was college trained, but he really didn't prepare his children to go to college. Unfortunately the depression era came along. I've spoken to a lot of women who felt that they couldn't go on with their training because they were needed for family support. She felt that way. Then she got married and started a family.

AW: What sort of work did she do?

HH: She did assorted work. Restaurant work. She wasn't really a cook. she worked as a waitress. She worked at a large restaurant as a pie-cutter and she also did domestic work, working in homes, cleaning, laundry. She did some work, but not very long, with a hairdresser in a beauty shop. So whatever. She was a hard-working woman.

AW: How many siblings did you have?

HH: I had two sisters.

AW: And you grew up in Raleigh?

HH: Yes.

AW: But you were encouraged to go on to college?

HH: Yes. I grew up in a home where it was education-oriented. There was always an interest. We had lots of books. I grew up in a home with my great-grandmother. When my grandmother got married, my mother's mother, she and her husband moved in; so when my parents got married, they moved in. So I guess in the early years they were buying books and they were always around which stimulates your reading. Then we lived near the Shaw campus. A lot of people around us were going to college. So I did attend Shaw. I just felt Shaw was my school before I ever went. Because we used to attend a lot of the activities there on the campus.

AW: So you lived at home while you attended college?

HH: Yes.

AW: That was a necessity. Like most kids, I had in mind I'd like to go away somewhere. But my parents were always quite honest and they said when I was reaching my senior year in high school and considering college, they said, "Well, we cannot afford to send you away to college. You will have to choose between the black colleges here in Raleigh". There were other colleges but there were two that were open to black students. And they said "We will send you to either one of those."

AW: And when was that?

HH: That was in '49. So I was interested in a local college and received a small scholarship. So I decided, "Well, Shaw has been my school all these years, so it's still my school. So that's where I went.

AW: Were you a good student?

HH: Yes, I was a very good student. I was valedictorian in my high school class and I was third in my college graduating class.

AW: And did you know that you were going to be a teacher? Was that your original goal in life?

HH: I went through a lot of different phases of things. I guess like most students, you just go through a lot of different things. And when I was in high school I worked on our newspaper staff and as a cartoonist, and I dreamed of being a cartoonist. I really had all sorts of art. I started in art in elementary school. As I look back on it, there must have been some special grants, but in my elementary school, which was there in Raleigh, we had art teachers who came in. There were schools in there that didn't have it, so that's why I think it was something special at the time. I don't really know. But we had art class. I remember we had art easels, drawing and painting, and watercolors. And we had assigned times we would go in for our art class. And we also had an art gallery in the school where works of artists were brought in. And I don't know if students were exhibited there or not. I can't remember that. I really don't remember any of the student work in the gallery.

AW: Were they paintings by black artists?

HH: I don't remember the paintings being necessarily typical of the modern paintings at that time. So if they were by black artists, they weren't typical of the art at the time.

AW: You don't know if there were women artists?

HH: I don't know. I really don't know. Now, the teachers were--I know it was a man and a woman but right now I can't remember whether they were husband and wife or just a male and female artist. But somehow I think they were probably married. I can remember winning--I still have my prize. It was a camera. It was just a small box camera. But, you know, it was significant to me that I won this prize. I don't think I had any special art talent, if you want to know the truth about it. And even in high school I tried the arts, but I soon came to the conclusion I really didn't have the talent for it. But, even so, at that time I was still interested, but once I decided on where I was going to college, Shaw did not offer an art major. And there were students who went there who transferred out in a couple of years to

schools, who were interested in art. So in the end, I really was beginning to feel--by my senior year in high school I had grown into--I always had an interest in art and read every book in the library. We had a fairly big public library for blacks in Raleigh. The librarian worked real hard at getting more books in the library. Have you been in Asheville long?

AW: Only about three years.

HH: Okay. So you weren't here when there was a black library. Like here, the one in Raleigh was small, but she was good to purchase a real large home that was in the downtown area and move the library there. And that's when I can remember really going to the library. Because then they had enough space to really spread out and put the subjects together and I could keep up with science, what was there.

AW: Was this interest something that was taught or was it something that was just inside of you?

HH: I guess it was just something inside of me, because I don't remember anyone in particular, you know, around me that had a science interest. I don't recall that we sat around and talked about what my father's interests were, but I have a feeling it was probably not. He seemed more interested in government. My mother was typical among women at that time. Her interest was in the home. It was kind of a disappointment to her that all three of us were interested in science and math and not home economics. And so I guess she just gave up. "There's no hope here. I'm not going to get anybody interested in..."

AW: Do you think she thought there was more opportunity in that field?

HH: I don't think so. I think she just thought it was more appropriate. And then, too, it could be that she thought of the experiences in a rural community. A lot of times, back in those years in particular, people in home economics and agriculture, you often worked with farmers and quite often these were people that families would see and hopefully would offer them employment. I know the first community I worked in was that way. The home demonstration agent, the farm agents, they were really employing people in the rural communities. So that could have been it. You know, I think if she had gone to college, that would have been her major. She was also interested in sports. And my youngest sister did follow her there and I

didn't. She played tennis. I think she was state women's champion at one time. She was quite good. And my mother played basketball in her day.

AW: Did you work while you were in college?

HH: Yeah, I worked on the campus. I had a kind of work aide type scholarship and I did several things. When I first went there, I worked a receptionist, I guess you'd call it. In the office when you'd come in the door. I wasn't there long. And then, of course, they found out that I could type and I went to work in the registrar's office typing and whatever else, filing and everything else. And I guess I was there for maybe a year and then I went to work as a student teacher.

AW: Was your degree in education?

HH: My degree was in chemistry. And with a minor in mathematics and education.

AW: I have to tell you a story. When I was at the University of Missouri working as a counselor in the student affairs office, we had two majors that we knew when students came in with those majors, it was going to be strange: one was psychology and the other was chemistry. Why was that do you think?

HH: I think there is some mystique with some people about those areas. I think it's just something you learn because we haven't known a lot of people who have been in those fields. Now, when I was in high school, that's really when the emphasis began to grow. I had one of my neighbors who was my chemistry teacher. She was quite a strict white girl. And I told her I was interested. And biology, a general science, was required. Chemistry, I can't remember whether it was required or not. And I also took physics. And I enjoyed it. The teachers that I had, I guess the biology course was the one that I liked least. I never cared too much about the animal life. It's okay. But even in college, I took what biology I had to take. But, I don't know, there was nobody--I had a personal interest in it and we didn't have any special guidance. No, we had nothing, really. As I look back on it, I don't remember anything special about it. But in high school, of course, we had science classes. And, frankly, we had better than most schools. You know, you never realize these things until you get out later. Because I really didn't realize it--I did not fully realize it until I came to Asheville to work. And I

had heard a lot about Stevens Lee High School in Asheville. They had statewide recognition and when I came here and saw their science department I was totally disappointed. I said, "This is worse than my high school". Because at least we had the basics, you know, we had the lab tables, the things that were available. And I came here to work and--I came here as a math teacher so I wasn't really concerned, personally concerned, except that when I walked in and saw that all they had was some tables and stools and not really anything, I thought to myself, "What is this?"

AW: Was it an all-black high school?

HH: Yes, it was THE black high school in this area. Not just, you know, Asheville. Students came here from Madison County, from Yancey County, maybe from some other places. Well, I know they came from some other places further away. Those were the nearby counties. They did have a black high school in Haywood County and in Henderson County. But, of course, here in Buncombe County that was the only black high school.

AW: Do you know if the facilities in the white high school were better?

HH: I really don't know. They were different when I went to that school to work, but I know how long they had been that way because the principal seemed to imply they hadn't been that way all the time. But I never visited the school so I don't really know.

AW: Did you go to work as a teacher right after graduation?

HH: No, I worked five years and then took a year off and went to graduate school.

AW: And those years you worked in Raleigh?

HH: No, I worked in a little town about 30 miles southeast of Raleigh.

AW: When did you meet your husband?

HH: I met him when he came here. His wife had died.

AW: So he was an Ashevillian.

HH: No.

AW: Oh, I saw that street sign, Haith.

HH: No, he developed this area. And he decided to name the street for himself.

AW: Well, good for him.

HH: No, he's from Alamance County. But he, too, came here to work.

AW: You went to undergraduate school in Charlotte.

HH: I went to graduate school at Chapel Hill.

AW: In Chapel Hill. Okay. And was this a degree in education?

HH: Yes, a master's in education.

AW: From Chapel Hill.

HH: Uh-huh.

AW: Was that a good experience?

HH: It was good. It was an interesting experience, I guess is the best way to describe it. Because this was in '58 and '59. North Carolina was still pretty much segregated, although there had been some integration. The University at Chapel Hill had been--I wasn't among the first group of students going there integrating the school. They had already been integrated but not very much. There were probably--the enrollment there at that time was probably like five or six thousand students in the whole university. And there were about 25 or 30 black students. So we were still quite a minority. But the campus was quite open. There was no--well, there were some small incidents. But in general, the campus life was very good. I don't remember anything personally, on campus. But once you left the campus, it was a totally different story. The outside community was not integrated. And most of the time students knew places that were not welcoming and so we just tried to avoid those places. And, for the most part, the businesses that catered to the campus, they were right there in the campus area. I can't

remember tut one business that maintained its segregated policy while I was there and that was a movie theater there near the campus. And I didn't give it much thought because I didn't have the time to go to the movies. But my roommate was a music major, a black student, and she--there was some movie, I don't remember now, a movie that had to do with the life of some musician or special works of some musician, something, and she was planning to go and that's when we realized that the movie theater. It wasn't segregated, it wasn't open at all to the blacks. Where some theaters, you know, had segregated areas for blacks at that time, but this theater did not welcome blacks at all. So that was when I realized that. But once you moved out of the area of the campus, there were pockets of segregation.

AW: Do you have any anger from that time?

HH: No. Some people do, but I don't know--I've never let any of this anger--I grew up in a community that was a black community in Raleigh, but oddly enough, there were whites all around. I don't know why they happened to be part of our community because it was really all--the homes and everything there were black families, but for a while we had a white neighbor next door, the husband was German and while they lived there, it could be just because he bought the house and he really didn't give it any regard as to what kind of neighborhood he was in. I don't know. There were a lot of Jewish people used to live and had businesses in our community. Several, I can think of at least about four different Jewish families within, say, a radius of two or three blocks. So there wasn't, you know, I never had any dealing with any abuse. A lot of the things, there were inconveniences, but you just went on and ignored it. And I guess there were so many things, Raleigh has an unusual history because it was the capital but it was basically a black city for years back before my time. And the blacks owned and ran the businesses. The whites came in during the time the legislature was in session and they needed services and went out and had those services. And then gradually they began to move in and began to move to Raleigh and the community started growing. And, of course, it grew and grew, to like it is now. But in the early years, you didn't really concern yourself about it being segregated. Even businesses that were segregated, if they ran something for whites, and blacks were excluded, it was just something that was. You just accepted it and it wasn't something that you got frustrated about.

AW: So that was a general feeling. I remember the anger of the sixties.

HH: Well, there was a lot of frustration and there were a number of--I remember in the community where I first taught, the schools, everything was still segregated. And it was a little town so there wasn't much to do there and we used to go to Lewis(?), a little town. It was what we used to call a (?) school, and I taught high school there and I lived on the campus because in a lot of these small communities you couldn't find any housing so the schools had housing for teachers. And so the teachers ran this co-op and for tax purposes they had to charge us something, just minimum, something like a dollar per person that lived there, something like that. So the rent was nothing. Plus we had a full-time housekeeper, we had to pay her salary. And we had to pay for the utilities. We divided the cost among us.

AW: That sounds good.

HH: Yeah, we really enjoyed it. It was an ideal situation, especially the other teachers. There were some men. Men who moved into the community, most of them roomed with people in the community and could eat there. But the way the housing was, it made it kind of difficult for men and women unless they had a number of men. The building was sort of in two little sections. Maybe enough men could make one section, But otherwise we just had women living there.

AW: After you came here, how long were you at Stevens Lee?

HH: Let's see. I was at Asheville High 18 years so I guess it was seven. And actually, it started integrating before I went there. I guess the students were completely segregated about six years. Then they started in the seventh year which is the year that the schools, French Broad integrated.

AW: Do you remember what year that was?

HH: That was '65. Because what was happening about that time, the pressure was really on to integrate schools. And instead they built a high school for the black community, they built South French Broad. And we moved there in '65. And I worked there one year. That year the school was started integrating. There was some integration of teachers. There was a white teacher who came over from Asheville High School to work at South French Broad. She was really quite a good person to have been placed there in that situation, I thought.

AW: What did the community think about this? Was there a lot of turmoil?

HH: You mean during the time we first started integrating?

AW: Yeah.

HH: Well, I think the community was....

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(BEGINNING OF DISC TWO)

HH: I think there were some lawsuits. But we started with one or two black teachers to work at the white school. And then--do you have Lucille Burton on that list there?

AW: Yes.

HH: Okay. Because I think she was perhaps one of the first black teachers to go to work in a white school. And then Miss Walton(?) came over to our high school and then there were a few black students that came over to the white high school and some white students were enrolled in the black high school. Then at the end of that year, it was about '66, I think there were two black--there were two of us they put--two or three, I believe there were three, and then they brought in the next students. And what they were doing, they were really trying to work it out over time. Because I think it was becoming apparent that we were going to integrate the schools and we would begin with one high school, one junior high school. So at the end of that year, 1966, I was informed that there was a vacancy in chemistry over at Lee Edwards and they wanted me to go over and take the job.

AW: Did you?

HH: I did. I really did not want to do it. Not because of hearing about working in that environment, but it was that I felt that I wanted to stay with the faculty I was with until we really integrated. And, of course, at that point, as far as I was concerned, we were not integrated. So I remember the principal had the superintendent to come over and talk to me about it and together they put a little pressure on me so I realized, I said, "Well, I'm going to have to do it". And of course, later I realized it was the best thing to have

done because if they had hired another chemistry teacher to come in, when they really got ready to integrate, there would have been some problems--you know, what are you going to do with all these people. So that was in '66, the schools integrated '69, so they knew what was on the horizon.

AW: Were those years pretty good ones?

HH: '66 to '69?

AW: Uh-huh.

HH: They were fair. They were okay. Noting to rave about. But it was...

AW: But the experience wasn't one that you look back and...

HH: No, it was quite interesting. Because during that time, there were a lot of things being done to get--to prepare teachers and students for what was about to take place.

AW: What was done?

HH: Well, there were any number of workshops, people were calling in specialists, you know, to come talk with us about possible problems, we discussed differences. There were meetings to bring the faculties together, sessions where we could become acquainted with each other. Same things were done with the students in both schools, you know, beginning to discuss things and to iron out what they would do about student organizations, student leaders, and all of that. And the professional organizations, at that time, we had a black teachers organization and a white teachers organization. So for a couple of years, yes, when I went to work at Lee Edwards, I joined both organizations because--well, I was a member of the black organization and because of the school situation I was working in, I needed to join what was then the white organization. And, of course, the organizations, too, were across even state lines, working to merge the groups. So all of these things were happening, you know, over that time. It was a very interesting time. And everybody seemed really geared up and trying to get things going and get them going smoothly. I thought it was a very good time. And then, of course, we went through the integration. And also, at that time, I'm trying to think--it seems to me that they had already started--the school board had decided--it is hard to pinpoint because I wasn't

working at the elementary school--but they started the elementary school, their playing, all the layers, their plan in the inner city was to merge it at first grade and just move it on up. And, of course, that could have taken about 20 years to have it that way. You know, to do it grade by grade. And then they were thinking students would start out together and there would be that togetherness or whatever. They had started that, then the courts the courts forced them to go ahead and get the whole business going. And I think that was in the early seventies they were forced to go ahead and get it all--and that was terrible, really. I didn't feel it so much because the high school was already integrated. But the elementary--and many of our young adults were some of those children that were caught up in that situation and some of them are still bitter about what happened to them. And a part of what we are hearing about happening here in the schools and the attitudes that the parents are having, I clearly understand their problem because many of them are the kids that were caught up in this situation and were part of it and it was not a good experience. And they probably have their bitter memories. It was far worse for the students than it was for the teachers.

AW: What do you suppose the difference--was it just not planned as well? Is it different in ages or protective of the young children than in high school? The parents didn't--the difference between the families.

HH: No. I don't know but it was probably because the elementary school children, there wasn't any real preparation of the students. With the high school students, they had been meeting together, discussing things. They felt like they had a part in what was going on. Now, we had--I mean it wasn't smooth sailing at the high school. It's just that as far as the people within the school family was concerned, it was okay. But we had a lot of outsiders who were creating numerous problems. Most of it came from outside. Because unfortunately with preparation we had been dealing with people who were a part of the school family. But the rest of the community, when we integrated, we had riots, we had--it was just like a war zone over at the high school.

AW: I see what you're saying. And the younger children, of course, didn't have it so they were just...

HH: They were thrust into this situation with absolutely no preparation. Although I thought the court cases were brought by people--the cases were brought before the high school integration. But by the time these things

worked their way through the courts, the high school was already integrated. The elementary schools were not. They were forced to integrate, even right in the middle of the school year. The schools were just torn apart, so to speak, to bring about integration. And it caused a very tough time for everybody. Some teachers were bitter about it but a lot of the children, I'm sure, were just thoroughly disgusted with what was happening.

AW: All in all, your teaching experience--you say 30 years.

HH: Yes.

AW: You've been retired how many years?

HH: Five years.

AW: You can begin to look back on it, probably, from a distance--

HH: Yes.

AW: --and look at education and what do you see when you look back on it? What changes? Because there's always some--

HH: Well, I think we've made tremendous progress, despite the complaints, the criticisms that people make about the students, I really think the schools have made tremendous progress and the schools are still doing a good job. I think that the problems reflect the problems of society, the attitudes. I spoke to a group of teenagers last night, and the children coming along now have no idea. I mean, they were not even born during all of this. So for them, they can't really understand a lot of things. They can't understand the present situation and they can't understand the anxiety that a lot of the adults feel for them in their quest for education. A lot of them, they take it too much for granted. They aren't interested. They have a just so-so-so sort of attitude. And it's because they really don't understand the history of how things got to where they are now. And it's true that we have a lot of students. We have a lot of students already graduating from high school or dropping out unprepared and all this, but in my way of thinking, I think the public hasn't the past, they don't listen to people. And the people they should really be listening to are the teachers.

AW: Okay.

HH: And I have felt this way from the very first year of teaching. Because I was always actively involved in what was going on, not just going in my classroom and teaching but working with the broader picture. And the teachers know, they are the ones who have to deliver the--they're the ones who do the job. You can have school boards, you can have administrators of all descriptions, but when you finally get down to it, there's the teacher there who is delivering the goods or not delivering the goods to the children.

AW: And they are left out of the loop.

HH: And they are usually left out of everything. It was that way when I first started teaching and although teachers as a group work real hard to become more involved, that's why they have become politically involved. And, of course, a lot of people, they have held it against teachers for doing this. But you're there and you know what kind of things could be done and should be done to make it possible for you to deliver a better product. And when nobody really pays any attention to what you're saying, it's frustrating. But I find that it still happens. And the public's perception is that everybody knows more about it than those teachers do. And the teachers are usually the last ones to be called upon and if they are between, say, a teacher and a school board member, or a teacher and a superintendent, a teacher and a principal, or a teacher and almost anybody, the other person's opinion is usually valued much more than the teacher's.

AW: Are administrators usually former teachers?

HH: Many of them are. I don't know that that is--that should be good, in a way, and I think perhaps it is, if they have had that experience. But I'm not so sure it's really necessary. Because what an administrator has to do is very different from what a teacher has to do, so I don't think there is anything particularly to be gained, except that it would help the administrator to better understand some of the things that teachers are faced with. And maybe it would make them a little more sympathetic to them, but I'm not really sure if it does. By my way of thinking, I don't think it does.

AW: When did you run for the school board?

HH: Four years ago.

AW: How did that happen?

HH: That's the story of my life.

AW: Well, tell me about that experience?

HH: Well, it has been a very good experience. I was encouraged to apply for it. I thought it was a very simple thing. I checked with City Council for an application. I filled it out and thought, well, when they get these applications they will sit down and go through them. Maybe call me in for an interview. Well, it turns out it wasn't really that simple. It's far more complicated than I realized. I really don't have any strong interest in politics. That year it didn't seem they really had it together. But they had one vacancy. The person who was expiring--I was...City of Asheville, Betsy Siler(?) and I were in the same program, got involved and everything, and then we were both competing for the same appointment. It was a very interesting time.

AW: Who was that?

HH: Betsy Siler(?). Let's see, she was probably getting ready to leave when you were coming here. She's not in Asheville right now. Her husband is a physician and he was going back to school and I think it was going to be temporary but it was going to be for a few years. But we were in this program together when we suddenly realized--I was of the opinion that she was not seeking reappointment. And if I had known--I'm not quite sure--but anyway, it was the black community that was encouraging me to run. But I also got a lot of encouragement from former co-workers, black and white. People I had worked with, they said, "Yeah, we need a former teacher on that board." So there was a lot of encouragement. And it got real messy.

AW: Did you have--

HH: Well, what the council did, the council makes an appointment. So I called each council member and asked if they wanted to see me. Some of them came over here to see me. Try to get their minds made up. And, whatever, some of them I went to their offices and talked with them. And then, as the time got closer and the community was getting more and more involved, and I was beginning to say, "I just want it over", and frankly I don't care what they do. And then the night before the council meeting, I

think that's when it was, the night before, the mayor called and said that I was going to be appointed. Then they had another vote because both of us--they had a resignation from the board and that was a surprise. Norma Price's husband was on the board. He as chairman of the board at that time. There was some people that felt there was a cadre of the council appointment, the chairman of the board. And I don't really think that. The school board does not really work with the council. The board is autonomous and the council does not stand and breathe over our shoulder and say "You do this" and "You do that." There isn't that kind of relationship. I don't really feel that there was a problem. So he decided to resign. And that left two vacancies. So Betsy got appointed and we both got on it.

AW: And you remained friends?

HH: Yes, we remained friends through the whole deal, really. We were talking about it and we realized that it put a strain on the classmates, but we made it clear to them--I think when they could see that the two of us were not having any real problem, then it made it easier for them. They weren't really sure how to deal with this originally and, of course, after we both got appointed, they were all happy that way. And Betsy and I got to be very good friends during the time we were serving together.

AW: What did you learn from that experience about education? That's certainly a different role.

HH: Oh, it is, but I don't know really that I learned anything more about education. I learned a little bit more about politics. And that whole process, you know. I see these things that appear to be nonpolitical that aren't really nonpolitical. And it was really quite a political thing, although personally I didn't have to get out and campaign and all this, but I found out there were people I was able to talk with and others that made me think "What have I got myself into?" And in that regard, it was--there were people petitioning the council.

AW: What kind of pressures are there on the board, some different factions? I mean, that must be difficult.

HH: Well, I guess the pressures--usually there aren't many pressures. And of course, the kinds of problems you aren't necessarily to, the type you see in the papers, movements trying to make changes, are usually organizations.

And also with personnel, our greatest problems would be the personnel. Either people wanted to make changes or people needing to be changed or, you know, some other dissatisfaction. Or people wanting additional benefits and things of this sort. But those kinds of things are fairly routine.

AW: Is it a pretty good system? I mean, no system is perfect, but--

HH: I really think that it is. I think it's a very good system. And I really think that we have not done enough to let the public really know. The people that do not work in it, though--and I can understand--and I don't mean the people that work in it think it's perfect now, but when they compare and get around and some of them and they get in and they see. I didn't get to see because once I came here, I was here so long, I couldn't really compare it with what was going on in other systems. So what I would get would just be things I would get by talking to the people. And, of course, organizations and all, a lot of times you get with other systems and talk with them and I could see that there were a lot of good things. And we do. I think there are things that our community has taken for granted that if they really got out and across the state, and saw what was going on even across the nation, the thing that I see there are schools that are better than many of our schools, but when you look at some of the systems--I have a sister, worked for a while in the schools in Rochester, New York. And she worked in what was their prize high school. But you see, that's what a lot of systems have. They will have a school which is the prize, and then the other schools are lacking in so many many ways. No effort to try to keep all of the schools good. And I really believe that our school system is good. I had a call from a parent about elementary schools. She wanted to get her child in the alternative program and not everybody that wants to get in is going to get in. So she wanted to know if she didn't get in, you know, what other schools--because this was someone outside the area. And I told her, I said, "To be perfectly honest, I'm not just saying this, I think all of our schools are good." What we've had between Jones and Randolph is strictly a racial problem. I don't think there's a bit of difference between the teaching in the schools. But we have good programs and people in all the schools. And it's not a situation where you can say "This is a school that has all great teachers" and "This one has all the worst teachers here" and whatever, that is not true. The system has a lot of extra services that people here are willing to pay for.

AW: I read one time about the symphony coming into the schools.

HH: Yes, we have a special strings program. We have a very strong music program. Unfortunately, and maybe this is why we need to do some more public relations kinds of things to really acquaint the public. A lot of children are not taking advantage of some of the services that we have. It's probably because some parents don't know. It's just like they don't know there are black kids in the alternative program. And I think there are racial problems there. But, a lot of black families, I think, didn't even realize, didn't even know much about the program.

AW: I know that's one of the problems, isn't it, because you tell them and people that are in those programs like that assume that--

HH: This is true. You just don't realize how many--

AW: There could be a lot of ignorance out there, that didn't get addressed.

HH: This is true. And I'm really hoping that they will get help a little bit with that during the rest of the time that I'm sitting on the board, because I will really have more time then. There are a lot of responsibilities that go along with being chairman that prevent you from doing some of the things you want to do. I just didn't have time. But I have a little bit more time for getting out and telling people of the services that we have. We reach out, of course, to get people for a lot of the services, but some of the services were just announced and, you know, you have to take advantage. And the music program, I think, is one that a lot of children who should be taking advantage of it are not taking advantage of it and initially there was a great deal of interest but again it seems after the initial announcement, it is just there and many folk are not even aware of it. Same for art, we have art for all the students, counseling is available in all the schools. And these are things that a lot of schools don't have. They have them maybe in the high school or junior high, but not in all schools. We have them in all our schools. And then we have a special program for preschoolers. A program where children are screened and for daycare in our community. And they pull out those who have special problems and they are in a special program. They get special help. These are children who show some learning disability.

AW: From all preschools? Public and private?

HH: I understand that this has been all over Buncombe County. Not just in the city, but the children who get into the special program we have, they can be helped. It's voluntary. I mean, there are parents that don't want their children in it but we strongly encourage it. Most parents will agree to it, although sometimes some parents don't. But it's a very good program.

AW: Is there anything that you would like to do that you haven't had time to do? And when are you going to do it?

HH: I don't know what I want to do. I have all these things planned I was going to do when I retired.

AW: I guess you did. I guess you did.

HH: Some of them I have just discarded. I'll tell you one thing. I have been saving all these recipes, you know, I see a recipe here and I cut it out. I said, "Well, when I retire I'm going to get these recipes organized so I can find them when I need them." Well, I still have them. I've just thrown them all in a box. I'm not going to do all that cooking.

AW: That's right.

HH: Well, I haven't thrown them away yet. I still have them. I think that maybe sometime I want something different, I'll just ramble through the box and see if I can find it. But there's no point in me wasting time in getting organized. So that I have discarded. Some other things that I really thought that I wanted to do, I wanted to do some quilting. And I had not done any of it before. When my mother was growing up, they did quilting. Out of necessity, partly, they did quilting. And she just does not understand why I would want to spend my time quilting. So I started accumulating material and information about quilting. That was before I retired. And I started work on some small projects. I started learning different techniques and working with pillows, something small. And I guess I have about four or five pillow covers started and I haven't completed any of them. I mean, I have completed some of the quilting part, but I haven't really made the pillows. In the process of looking for a quilting class, the first quilting class that I signed up for, they called me and said that class had been canceled. I was trying to get in a daytime class and I had signed up, thought I was going to, and then they said they didn't get enough people. And I was so disappointed. It was in the winter. And what I had found was happening

after I retired, I was beginning to sit around and I was gaining weight like crazy. I was sitting down and watching TV and whatever. I could do something with my hands, so I ate. I'm not a smoker. So I happened to see in the paper a rug picking class and I called the number. This was through the home demonstration agent, whatever that group is called. And I called the number, which was the woman who was teaching the class and talked with her and asked her what--that I knew nothing about it. She said, "That's okay." I said, "Is there anything I need to bring?" She said, "A pair of scissors, that's all." So I took my scissors and went to class. And I started right in.

AW: You know what? What I'm realizing here, when we started talking, guess what we started talking about?

HH: Art.

AW: Yeah. How interesting.

HH: Yeah. But I haven't really had the kind of courage to get back to that kind of art. But I found it very interesting. It's not the latch-hooking. It's the one with strips of wool. The woman who taught it I thought was just great. Her husband made the frames that were available for us to use. A few people that were in the class had frames, but I had nothing because I knew nothing about it. So I used the frame they offered. Now, I believe the frame came with the course. I think we were paying for the course and it included the frame. And also enough materials to do a sampler. So then I got so interested in it. The teacher told us about a summer workshop that was going to be held in Greenville. So I thought, "I think I'll go". So I talked with her, because the paper about this workshop had the teachers listed and you were to let them know your first and second choice for teacher. And I didn't know anything about the ones who were teaching it so I contacted the teacher here and talked with her about it because she was familiar with these teachers. And then you had to select what you wanted to work on. Then I had no idea, so I went out to the teacher's and looked at some of her materials and patterns. And we decided on the colors and everything. And again I communicated directly with the teacher. And I had a most enjoyable weekend.

AW: When was this?

HH: Let's see. This must have been--it wasn't my first year of retirement, this was probably in the summer of '85. And when I got there, well, when we got there we just checked in. And my roommate was a woman from Chesnee(?). I didn't really realize how big this thing was in terms of variety and scope. There was a huge number of women there. They had about four or five teachers. They had four or five classes. My class was kind of large and my teacher was a very popular teacher. About 14 in my class. But the reason it turned out to be so large, a group came from Florida and they all tried to get in the same class. The students were in all levels. But when I got there, the teacher had it all--of course, I had taken my other equipment I needed. I had my frame. And I had new scissors. We worked on the project. (Laughing and mixed talking.) And that's something I want to get back to because I thoroughly enjoyed it. And I want to get back to camp down there. That was a very restful week. We'd get up in the morning and go to breakfast. And then we would--it wasn't all that early. At that time I don't think they assigned special hours. The dining room, it was open early. But some of the women would get up and go for a walk before breakfast. And after we would go to our classes and have class up until lunchtime. And then we would have lunch and then we would look around and see what others were doing. And then we'd have dinner in the evening and we would visit in the evening if you wanted to. Or you could do whatever you wanted. But most of the people there did something related to rug-hooking. You either worked on your own project or you went around to see what others were doing and studied their technique and looked at their equipment. Some of them had made things. There was a woman in the class with me whose husband had tried to construct a frame. It's really hard to figure what's the best kind of frame to use. But it's a kind of frame that we can just lay the material down and hook it up while it's resting on it. And it has pin-like things that hold the burlap in place. It would seem like it's just ideal. It's the kind that I purchased from the teacher here you pin the things all the way around. That's not bad, it just has large pins and you can take them out when you get ready to move it and pin it down again. All I'm saying is, it slips some.

(END OF SECOND DISC)